

1465

Responsibilities of parents

974

THE QUEEN

L3302343

A WOMAN'S WORK FOR EDUCATION

The Story of a Great Movement

Mrs CHARLOTTE M. MASON, a record of whose life-work has just been published,¹ will rank among the half-a-dozen or so outstanding women of the last 50 years who have left a permanent mark on the history of our country. She had, says Sir Michael Sadleir, "the general and commanding qualities of leadership; qualities of inspiring others not only with her own fine ideals but with the determination to put her educational aims and principles into practice." These principles were translated by Miss Mason in very simple language, and she gave them a few months before her death, at a Conference of the Parents' National Educational Union, a society founded by her long ago as 1897. "Let us think of our society," she said then, "as one of the 'Services.' What is the State? An idea! We are all in it, and we are all for it. What can we do? Absolutely the first service to the State is to present it with good citizens.... What are the qualities that go to make a good citizen? and how far does P.N.E.U. child development help? After Mason's words, the question was, "Is there not integrity, absence of self-conceit, self-contempt, vanity; unconscious obstinacy, singleness of purpose and motive, instant absolute attention—that is, concentration; these were the qualities aimed at by the educational worker in the P.N.E.U. Society?" She added, "She believed in the 'infinite power of education in every child'; it was a discovery of her society which became the basis of her educational methods."

Culture—liberal education—was the object aimed at, and she believed that way attained by the study of literature, art and nature. "Mind, capable of dealing with knowledge in its three aspects, knowledge of God, knowledge of man, knowledge of the natural world science, mind in that sense appears to be a universal possession and everyone should have the opportunity of developing it, except that such knowledge affords." She did not aim at producing the specialist, but the all-round intelligent human being such as the great educators desired, with, however, the religious and ethical factors always in his mind. Through the medium of the Humanities the pupils gained a first-hand knowledge of some of the best things that have been often neglected; they learnt to study by themselves and discovered long before the Dalton Plan the joy of original work, of freedom of thought. As secondary school marks, prizes place or the like is required; children work with joy for the pure love of knowledge."

The Parent as Educator

PERHAPS the greatest service Miss Mason did for education was to enlist the co-operation of the parent and to insist upon the value and importance of the home. The tributes paid by parents to the personal help received from this remarkable woman, who from the House of Education at Ambleside directed and inspired a network of operations all over England, a picture of the wonderful and widespread nature of her influence. Yet she was the enemy of all ted-tape, and set little store by organisations which, as it becomes more perfect, become more mechanical and the loss of the personal individual element.

"In proportion as a piece of work needs organisation, it lacks life," she would often say. "Don't make rules for arranging the school work alone; it must be done in the spirit of it, if you get state."

As long ago as 1898, in a paper setting out the aims and ideals of the P.N.E.U., we find these wise words: "No other part of the world's work is of higher importance, difficulty, delicacy and importance, than that of parents in their upbringing of their children. The first obligation of the parents is of passing forward a generation better than themselves—with parents.... Yet parents with the responsibility of future casting upon them are left to do their work each father and mother rarely getting so much as a word of sympathy, counsel or encouragement." It was to give parents the benefit of co-operation so that the new society could form.

A father of cataracts brought up in a Parents' Union Schoolroom bears testimony to the joy which Miss Mason's training brought to both parents and children. "The whole training," he says, "seems to invite a close companionship between parents and children through continual interest in their interests, and children through continual interest in their interests. I am sure that the love of learning in each other's lives is largely due to Miss Mason's insistence on teaching us parents to realise that our children, from earliest babyhood, are persons with an individuality of their own, and are to be treated as such, not looked upon as mere playthings. I can well recall, with gratitude and joy the days, eighteen or nineteen ago, when as a young mother I started to teach my small boys, and the delight of the P.N.E.U. School." She tells of the delightful symposiums held from time immemorial of the books to be read, of the advice given. "One of the main points of Miss Mason's work from the point of view of the teacher, was how much greater is the debt of the mother, than it was ever realised what home education might become, who changed the whole atmosphere of the home schoolroom, who inspired us for our work and gave us the power to carry it out."

The Democratic Vision

Mrs MASON'S work began with the parents and ended with the most brilliant classes, but liberal-minded parents, as she well knew, quick to realise the needs of the age, she devoted her best efforts to the education of the workers. In her last public utterance she said: "What is wanted is a democratic education

include not only the fit, the aristocracy of mind, high and low, rich and poor, but everybody. And now we of the P.N.E.U. are in a position to state that while an academic education will, of necessity, reach only the fit and the few, the home, the English meet, general education, a most interesting description is given in this book of measures of an elementary school on the Yorkshire chalkfield, where Miss Mason's idea of supplying children from the earliest age with a knowledge of the world outside the schoolroom, and the remarkable fact that democratic development, which only dates from 1915, has taken root in 275 elementary schools, the teachers to whom are enthusiastic over the syllabaries supplied from headquarters, while the children love the work and in turn, which have opened up a new and beautiful world to them."

This book is the record of a wonderful woman, whose life-work should be studied by parents and teachers alike. In an age of egotism, self-interest and falsehood, Miss Mason, with her broad liberal outlook and her profound knowledge of children are a tonic and a refreshment. She was an idealist and at the moment idealism is discredited in some high quarters; nevertheless, in spite of a great legal authority's recent dicta, all the great things in the world that were really worth doing have been inspired by the idealists.

of the "Merry Wives of Windsor" under the direction of Miss Clementine Dane and Mr. W. Arnold, the actors being scholars of the school. Four performances of "Hamlet," a difficult play for adults, and one would have imagined beforehand, an almost impossible task for schoolchildren, were given with great success, with good evidence of the careful study that had been devoted to it, ready and to the real enjoyment of the actors in their work. Students of the Birkbeck College, London, celebrated the opening of this educational institution, now a college of the University of London, by an admirable rendering of that rarely-acted and strong Elizabethan tragedy, "Aurora of Feverishant."

Francesca B. Low.

THE FIRST LESSONS

THE War familiarised everyone with the term *Home Officer*, and many people with the importance of the work entrusted to the individuals concerned. It seems to me that something analogous is found in the education of a child: for although, young and tender, its restricted, technical sense (education) would be shared with schoolwork, still with life in the world, I suppose, it would be the *Home Officer* who begins when school or schoolroom is entered, the years of babyhood which precede that epoch have their own bearing upon the subject. To-day, therefore, I propose to consider the position of the *Home Officer* between this department, which may be regarded as the schoolroom, and that of the nursery; and it is, perhaps, almost more by letters received in that department than in this that these words are suggested.

The value of early teaching as a matter much debated amongst educationalists, and one on which there is a great diversity of opinion. It is often confused in issue with various other considerations, too, with the result that it is less in itself than in connection with them that it is of real value in a child's life. Most of us who have any knowledge of the children of the poor, for instance, deplore deeply the impossibility to further the work officially, at any rate—and the nursery school, which they might well be, is not available to the masses. Many, indeed, Bar when we come to analyse this regret, we find that many factors which are not actually these of education as the schools regard them. The toddler who could not get into these schools would be taken from already over-crowded dwellings and from the streets, safeguarded physically, and allowed to gain lessons in order and discipline which, otherwise, they would never make acquaintance with. They would still be under medical observation, too, and if they were ill, would be sent to hospital or from the care of the baby clinic, to spend three, four, or even five years before they come again under the inspection of the school doctor—years fraught with any number of emergencies. But there are communities which have little to do with education again in the restricted sense which has its rightful place on this page. In the case of children most fortunately placed in the world, something of the same extraneous reasoning holds. The kindergarten, for instance, is a most valuable factor in modern households, into which the ordinary routine of nursery and schoolroom does not enter. They provide for the care of the children during many hours of the day, take them off from the care of their parents, and bring money and security free from the responsibilities which would otherwise have to be provided for. Again, such schools provide what is often so much needed for such children—the companionship of their peers, with all the lessons of practical life, too, which are of great assistance, with it brings. But here, again, we are apt to commit a proportionate and simple, although, obviously, thus, in the manner best suited to the age of the child and under the care of specialists, goes hand in hand with the other advantages in store for the child.

But let us first let the master down to the actual consideration of what is learned. I do not think these early days—say, before the seventh birthday—matter very much. What matters is that same training should be given which will put the child into the best condition of mind to receive the main mass of education when the time comes. To let a little thing run wild until it is six or seven, and then suddenly to transplant it to the schoolroom with its restrictions is to give a serious handicap. Long before this, however, most of us did indeed—a child should grow accustomed to "lessons" if only for ten minutes every morning; and these are best when taking the form of the mutual exercises of work in it to obtain particulars from any central "repository" appropriate to the child's age. This is to do, as the fact that it is learning, at definite time and place, which is of value. Children vary immensely, at that age, as well as later on. Some love picking out their letters, others, start with numbers, others with shapes, others with animals. Others find their natural inclination on outdoor life, with animals, or small compositions. But it is a great help in the serious matter of education when the bent towards it has been established in the baby days. If, however, a child has not been cultivated, whether of mind and body, immature as these necessarily may be. Memory should begin to work, too, without the least effort, while the brain can without the least effort, when it has been too much depressed by the wrong direction. And the groundwork of reading is learning the letters, and of music in the notes of the piano may well be laid, if only because they are so much more easily mastered at a very early age than later.



MISS C. MASON

By Fred Tukor

INTERESTING ART COMPETITIONS

THE Royal Society of Arts is engaged on an enterprise in formulating a scheme for encouraging the study of design for industrial purposes. It has decided to hold annual competitions, the first of which will take place in June, 1922, and will be open to two classes of competitors, students of Schools of Art and Art and Design polytechnics. Valuable prizes will be offered in each of the sections—Textiles, Furnitures, Book Production, Pottery and Glass, Mosaics, Cadbury offer a Travelling Scholarship of £500 for the best design in any section, and £100 for the best design for a box lid, and Messrs. Fry give a purse for pieces of £10 and £5 for designs for chocolate boxes. By means of these competitions the work of clever young art students can be adapted to industrial purposes. The Society of Art Workers will do a great service to the country. All particulars may be obtained from the Secretary of the society, John Street, Aldwych, W.C. 2.

The Oxford University Press, encouraged by the success of its recent Poster Exhibitions, has now arranged a drawing competition among girls' schools. Competitors, who must be under seventeen years of age, are asked to produce a coloured drawing suitable for an advertisement of the Oxford Book and Stationery Girls' College. Professor William Butterwick, Principal of the Royal College of Art, South Kensington, will act as judge, and the prizes are so arranged that both the school which produced the successful competitor and the latter will receive the award.

Some interesting dramatic performances have recently been given in the schools which show that a high standard is aimed at in the study of literature and the drama, and that much dramatic talent exists among our boys and girls. At Tonbridge School an excellent performance was given

¹ "In Memoriam." Charlotte M. Mason, Founder of National Educational Union.